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A New Year's letter from
Baron d'Estournelles
de Constant.

1914

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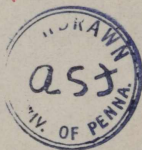
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A NEW YEAR'S LETTER FROM

BARON d'ESTOURNELLES de CONSTANT.

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HAPPY NEW YEAR TO MY MANY YOUNG
FRIENDS IN THE UNITED STATES

PARIS, DECEMBER, 1913.

DEAR YOUNG FRIENDS:

One of your most devoted guides in America asked me, two years ago, to let you hear a short talk on helpful subjects for morning exercises, anything, he says, to make you happier or better. I kept his fine and generous letter a long time on my table; very often I thought of it, but it is only this morning that I can write a suitable answer. I will write as I can, knowing that you are not too critical, and that you prefer my poor English to my best French. What I care for is not to send you a literary message, but to reach your hearts.

I have travelled a great deal and I am able now to draw from the various experiences of my life a con-



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clusion which may be of use to you, young friends, who have been so kind to me. Supposing that you can avail yourselves of my efforts, and that I can save part of your future troubles and deceptions, that will be the reward of your kindness, and a new illustration of our French proverb: "Un bienfait n'est jamais perdu."

You cannot know, indeed, what a blessing is the sympathy of youth for a man or for a woman of good will who has been depressed by the cold faces, by the indifference and the prejudices of the so-called "reasonable people."

When I feel sad and nearly discouraged, I can recover at once by simply meeting the pure and confident eyes of a child—even a young dog, suddenly jumping or looking at me with joy, can change my mind and refresh it; it can give me a new start. And so it is with the shining of the morning light.

Be kind, obliging, my dear friends, not only to your friends—that is too easy, and it is the only way to win their kindness in exchange—but to every being who may take comfort from your kindness. A mere smile may save a soul from despair. Never be avaricious of your smiling, of your regards, towards peo-

ple who are in trouble. Some powerful men can bring help by their assistance, their money, their material strength; a young man or a young woman can do still more by giving his or her sympathy. Do not be shy, do not be afraid of being ridiculous; a man who does the good work which the others will not do is often ridiculed at first, but not for long; express your good will as you can, with the right words or with no words, as long as you do not keep it for you alone.

Be true and faithful; it is so easy to lie; but remember that we cannot deceive twice the same friend; we have to change him; and, at length, we find no more friends to listen to us; they all know they cannot trust our word. Never speak against your past friend; keep silent and reserved about his fault, which may be yours; otherwise the new friend will find that you can change and he will not feel safe with you.

Never be violent, except to resist a violent aggression, if you see not other honorable issue. That is the great effort for you! Violence is such a temptation for a strong boy and even for a little boy! I should say even for a little girl . . . but the temptation does not last for her; she soon discovers that violence does not pay; and she looks for other ways of dis-

cussing her rights. She actually finds these ways (I am not speaking of the suffragettes. . . .). Violence seems, at first, so innocent, so easy, so natural; a mere application of our forces; sometimes a precious help; a good blow! Is it not a good lesson for a bad boy? Yes, indeed, but a bad example, too! Violence is not the way to teach Justice and Right. Suppose your masters would use it to illustrate their explanations with you. . . . There is no limit to violence. Violence has no end. It is never a solution. The violent boy has to be, every day, stronger than his comrade; but he cannot be as strong as all his comrades together.

I have always found that violence leads to domination and that domination does not last, cannot last; the end of it is, sooner or later, collapse and humiliation. This is true for a boy, still more for a man, still more for a nation.

Never a nation, even a great Empire, could last by domination; what they are so proud to call "imperialism" has been and will be always the beginning of the end; it is now a well-known fever, an archaic illness, a backward policy. When the majority of the people of a great country stop their work and think only of armaments, conquests and ostentation, then it

means they are isolating and weakening themselves; instead of friends, they have nobody in the world to support them; far from it; conceited, suspected everywhere, they become a danger for all the other nations. Far from being stronger, they feel dissatisfied and angry. They are no longer so good at work; their intellectual and moral progress, their industry, their genius and consequently their production, artistic, scientific, economic, go lessening every year, compared with other nations. They cannot even understand the reasons of their inferiority; they become jealous and sensitive; they see enemies, spies, danger everywhere; they may extend their military forces; their vitality goes shrinking. The slightest misunderstanding with another nation is sufficient to bring a war which is not a remedy, but the end of all. A war, now, is not what it was in the past, when the brave chevalier had to face his enemy. Now he has to fight at such a distance that he does not know and he does not see the other army; he does not even know why he is at war and what will be the results of the battle, even if victorious. He knows only that the nation had to pay, for the preparation of that war, billions and billions of dollars which were needed to make the country

really strong and prosperous, surrounded by friends and customers, billions which were wanted for making good roads, restoring your forests and your rivers, building railways, ports, universities, hospitals, museums, parks and fine cities. He knows that the nation will have to pay still more after the war, in order to be more and more unsafe and isolated.

You, American young friends, you are a new nation, a new living hope for the world. I expect a great deal, for the future of the old Europe, from your good will and your good faith. Do not imitate our faults! Do not become too matter of fact, too self confident; do not dream of extending your country which is already—compared to ours in Europe—as large as a continent; that is my Christmas wish: keep young, keep kind, keep true, confident in your future, faithful to your past. Never forget our common ancestors, our French pioneers, from La Salle to La Fayette and de Lesseps, who so willingly devoted their lives to prepare yours; it is not enough for you to accept their legacy, you have to develop it, that is to say, to increase its value, not its size; you have to make your new world so good that it becomes an ex-

ample for our old one. Yes! we need your American initiative as you need our experience. No more than a man, can a nation live alone. Your progress will stimulate our progress; your faults would stop our way as well as yours.

And now, good-bye, dear friends; no, good morning—never good-bye—we never die as long as we leave our work behind us; good morning to you; happy day, happy New Year. . . . The sky has not changed, the cold winter prepares a mild spring; enjoy your life, enjoy your day; consider your teachers as your friends; listen to them; think of them; speak of them; you will make them happier and better; and you will then feel yourselves in better spirits to play your fascinating baseball, to ride your bicycle or your horse, to drive your motor car (if you can get one), to paddle your canoe, to swim in the deep waters, to walk, to run, to climb, to breathe. . . . Don't forget to learn French, in order to come and see me and to make new friends in the old world; be happy, be gay, be strong, in order to help anyone who needs your health and your strength. The more you help other people, the more you will find everywhere assistance and sympathy. The more your country will appear friendly

to other nations, the greater and happier she will be.

There is the fruit of all my political experience; that is what I would call the modern wisdom of men as well as of nations.

D'ESTOURNELLES DE CONSTANT.